

As early as February 1945, the leaders of America, Britain and the Soviet Union had held talks at Yalta and secretly agreed that the Soviet Union should join the war against Japan. In July, the three leaders met again at Potsdam on the outskirts of Berlin, and issued the Potsdam Declaration, setting forth the conditions for Japan's surrender, but the Japanese government ignored it. As the day approached for the Soviet Union to join in the war in accordance with the Yalta agreement, America—partly out of a desire to have the edge over the Soviet Union in the postwar world—dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, respectively. As a result, enormous numbers of people were killed or injured, and the towns were reduced to ruins. The number of dead, including those who died later from exposure to radiation and other causes, amounted to more than 200,000 in Hiroshima and more than 100,000 in Nagasaki.

On the 8th, between these two days, the Soviet Union abrogated its treaty of neutrality with Japan and sent forces into Manchuria, southern Sakhalin and the Kurils. Finally, on August 14, the Japanese government accepted the Potsdam Declaration and surrendered, the nation being informed of this fact the following day, the 15th, in a recorded broadcast by Emperor Showa. August 15 was to be the day of national liberation for people in Korea and Japan's other colonies. The number of dead among Japanese military and civilians in World War II was approximately 3.1 million, while the total number of dead in the war as a whole is said to have reached some 60 million.*

In July 1945, delegates from the U.S., Britain, and the Soviet Union met for talks in Potsdam, Germany. The Potsdam Declaration, made in the names of the U.S., Britain, and China, called for Japan to surrender and submit to democratization. However, the Japanese government ignored the declaration and urged the Japanese people towards a fight to the finish.

As a result, the U.S., which had succeeded in experiments to create the world's first atomic bomb and motivated also by the desire to come out of the war more powerful than the Soviet Union, dropped an atomic bomb

* *Japan in Modern History, Junior High School Textbooks*. Tokyo: International Society for Educational Information, 1994, 515.

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The Atomic Bomb

The atomic bombs that were dropped on Japan were by far the most destructive weapons ever used. Today, the debate still rages over whether the United States was justified in using the atomic bombs on the populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—as evidenced by the varied perspectives of these excerpts.

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JAPAN

Why the Atomic Bomb?

Was the atomic bomb really necessary in order to make Japan surrender? President Truman said that use of the atomic bomb saved the lives of tens of millions of American and Allied troops. An English scientist claimed that the dropping of the atomic bomb represented a cold-blooded sacrifice of the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as pawns in postwar strategy toward the Soviet Union. Another theory holds that the bomb was dropped in order to justify to American taxpayers the \$2 billion spent in making the bomb.*

* *Japan in Modern History, Junior High School Textbooks*. Tokyo: International Society for Educational Information, 1994, 511.

on Hiroshima on August 6, and another one on Nagasaki on August 9. Both cities were annihilated in a flash. By 1950, it was estimated that more than 200,000 people in Hiroshima and 140,000 people in Nagasaki had died as a result of the atomic bombings, making this the worst tragedy in the history of mankind.

The radiation from those bombs was so great that its effects are still causing suffering to the victims of the bomb even today, and people are still dying from it. The names Hiroshima and Nagasaki have become symbols for people all over the world in their fight for the total abolition of nuclear weapons.

On August 8, two days after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, the Soviet Union abandoned its neutrality pact with Japan and declared war on Japan based on the Yalta agreement. The Soviet army advanced into Manchuria, southern Sakhalin and the Kurils. The Japanese army continued to retreat, but while the army retreated, there were still Japanese people left behind in these places. Some committed mass suicide rather than be captured.

Under the circumstances, the Japanese government finally agreed to submit to the Potsdam Declaration and surrendered on August 14 after trying to gain assurance that the imperial system would be continued in Japan even after defeat. On the 15th, the emperor conveyed Japan's surrender to the Japanese people on the radio. This brought to an end Japan's war of invasion, which had lasted for fifteen years from the time of the Manchurian Incident, and also World War II. Victims of this war around the world numbered 60 million—10 million in China alone, and it left deep wounds on peoples everywhere.*

The greatest number of foreign victims of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were Koreans. It is said that some 25,000–28,000 Koreans were in Hiroshima at the time of the bombing, of whom 5,000–8,000 died; in Nagasaki there were 11,500–12,000 Korean victims, of whom 1,500–2,000 died. There are an estimated 20,000 atom bomb victims still living in South Korea, and the question of responsibility for their medical treatment and livelihood has become an issue.†

* *Japan in Modern History*. Tokyo: International Society for Educational Information, 1994, 343–353.

† *Japan in Modern History*. Tokyo: International Society for Educational Information, 1994, 355.

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PHILIPPINES

What brought Japan finally to her knees were the horrible atomic bombs. The first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, and it wiped out 60% of the city. Two days later, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan. On August 9, Nagasaki felt the terrific explosion of the second atomic bomb; 40% of the city vanished. Unable to carry on the struggle and at the public behest of Emperor Hirohito, Japan finally surrendered unconditionally on August 15, 1945.*

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CANADA

Canada's Role in Developing the Atomic Bomb

On August 6, 1945, the world was forever changed. On this day, the Japanese city of Hiroshima was obliterated by the world's first atomic bomb. Three days later a second Japanese city, Nagasaki, faced the same fate. About 110 000 people were killed and an additional 10 000 injured by the two bombs, known as "little Boy" and "Fat Man." The bombing had the desired result—Japan was forced to surrender, and the war was over. The nuclear age had begun.

Research into nuclear capabilities had been underway for several years before the 1930s, but the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and the re-arming of Nazi Germany stepped up research into harnessing nuclear power for war. The race to develop the nuclear bomb, officially known as the Manhattan Project, became the largest research project the world had ever seen. Requiring a staff of more than 200 000, the development of atomic weapons absorbed more funds than NASA later spent to reach the moon.

Most Canadians are unaware of the crucial role Canada played in the development of the atomic bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Na-

* Zaide, Sonia M. *The Philippines: A Unique Nation*. Quezon City: All-Nations Publishing, 1999, 351.

gasaki. From the outset of the Manhattan Project, the Canadian government co-operated with the British and American governments to ensure that the Allies would develop the nuclear bomb before the Axis powers.

A key ingredient of an atomic bomb is uranium, a heavy radioactive metallic element. The Nazi conquest of Europe had the result that all European uranium refineries were under Nazi control. Only one uranium refinery was left for the Allies to use—the Eldorado Refinery in Port Hope, Ontario. It was here that all the uranium used in the Manhattan project was refined. Much of the uranium came from mines on the shores of Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories, and the heavy water used in the development of the plutonium bomb (Fat Man) was supplied by the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Co. in Trail, British Columbia. Canada's role in the development of the atomic bomb extended well beyond supplying raw materials. Canada provided a safe working environment, far from the battlefields, for British scientists working on the Manhattan Project. Also, Canadian scientists played a crucial role in the project from its beginning. They discovered uranium 235 (the basic element of the atom bomb), helped to create the first chain reaction using uranium 235, and discovered how to purify uranium 235. They also were part of the team working in New Mexico in 1945, which assembled the core of the first plutonium bomb.

Some Canadians were unwitting participants in the development of the atomic bomb. Men of the Sahtugot'ine people, a nomadic group of Aboriginal people who lived near Great Bear Lake, were hired as transporters for the uranium. Despite warnings from federal-government scientists about the dangers of radioactive substances, the Sahtugot'ine were allowed to carry tonnes of uranium without being provided with any protective clothing and were not warned about the dangers they faced. The men, covered in uranium dust brought the radioactive material into their tents, thereby unknowingly contaminating their families.

The long-term effects of their work in transporting the uranium have been devastating for the Sahtugot'ine community. Gina Bayha, from DeLine, N.W.T. noted: "Men from my grandmother's generation regularly lived into their nineties or one hundreds. But we hardly have any men past the age of sixty-five. They all died of cancer." In August 1998, representatives of the Sahtugot'ine travelled to Hiroshima, Japan to meet with survivors of the nuclear bombing. There they apologized for the indirect role they played in the destruction of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in

1945. Some Canadians celebrate the country's role in the atomic bomb as a great technological accomplishment; many others are ashamed of Canada's contribution to the development of weapons of mass destruction. Whatever their opinion, it is important for Canadians to understand Canada's role in the birth of the nuclear age.*

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GREAT BRITAIN

American scientists with the aid of British and European colleagues had developed a new bomb of unprecedented destructiveness. Two of these atomic bombs were dropped on the Japanese, ending their fanatical resistance and beginning a new nuclear age where the human species had, for the first time, the technological means of obliterating itself.†

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ITALY

Japan put forth a desperate resistance to American advances in the Pacific islands and to incessant air raids. The widespread use of the kamikaze technique by the Japanese pilots [...] and the garrisons' desire to destroy themselves rather than surrender [...] demonstrated that a true victory would have caused even more losses. But the war's outcome had already been decided even in this sector, and there was no doubt that in very little time the Japanese, already at the end of their tether, would have had to surrender. In these conditions the American president Harry Truman [...] decided, after having made an ultimatum that was then rejected, to employ in Japan the weapon that had been newly completed in the American nuclear laboratories.

[...]

Unlike what had happened in Europe after Germany's surrender, this time any joy over recapturing peace was overshadowed by anxiety and worries,

* Newman, Garfield, et al. *Canada: A Nation Unfolding*. Toronto: MacGraw-Hill, 2000, 244.

† Roberts, Martin. *Britain 1846–1964: The Challenge of Change*. London: Oxford University Press, 2001, 255.

provoked by images of the atomic mushroom cloud at Hiroshima and of the destroyed city. This extreme product of the intense technological efforts brought about by war—along with the invention of missiles, whose innovative range could not be grasped at that moment yet—offered a preview of dangers that until that moment had been unimaginable. How was such an important turning point arrived at?

The use of the atomic bomb in the last phase of the conflict was not essential from a military point of view, and the reasons for why that terrible decision was made have not been entirely made clear. Among other things, there was not even full knowledge of the effects the explosion would have, especially concerning the biological consequences of the exposure of a large mass of people to the radiation, and the genetic damage that the fallout would cause. The atrocious consequences of the radiation on the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and their children revealed themselves over the course of the years that followed the explosions of August 6th and 9th.

What seems certain is that that show of force, made indiscriminately at the expense of unarmed people, increased the United States' weight in post-war tensions and decisions, especially concerning the Soviet Union. It is probable therefore that Truman's decision was inspired more by post-war prospects than by calculations on the most convenient method to put an end to the conflict with Japan. From then on the problem of nuclear armament has had a decisive influence on world history, and has conditioned more than anything else the relations between the great powers and their attitudes toward the rest of the world.*

* Villari, Rosario. *Storia Contemporanea*. Bari: Laterza, 1990, 565–67.